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SPEAKER KROWINSKI CALLS ON GOVERNOR PHIL SCOTT, ADMINISTRATION TO TAKE ACTION TO MITIGATE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Montpelier, Vt. - In the last several days, we've received some good news and some bad news regarding the pandemic. Yesterday, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced it has granted Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccination full approval, which will hopefully add more confidence for those that were unsure of the vaccine's safety and effectiveness. However, research has shown that with the infectious nature of the Delta variant, vaccinated individuals can have "breakthrough cases" and transmit the virus, often without knowing they are infected. Vermonters that are eligible to get vaccinated should do so as it is a critical step in protecting yourself, your family, and your community and lowers the likelihood of having serious health complications. At this time, children under the age 12 are ineligible to be vaccinated, and with schools opening up and community spread across the state, I am calling on Governor Scott to take additional steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect Vermonters.

Since the start of the pandemic, Vermont has been leading the nation in our response to COVID, and Vermonters have stepped up heroically, steadfastly, and let evidence-based science guide our policy response. That's why I am concerned that the Governor's change in strategy is failing to keep Vermonters, all of us, safe. We need to be more proactive in following guidance from the CDC and ensure that we are doing everything we can to mitigate the spread of the virus. Students, teachers, and staff are returning to school this week, and all Vermonters should be confident that everything is being done to protect everyone in these congregate settings.

Over the last few weeks I have heard from Vermonters asking questions that we should have answers to including:

1. The CDC is recommending that all people, no matter their vaccine status, wear masks when indoors. In addition to Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, there are five states that currently have some type of mask mandate; they include Hawaii, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon. What number of new infections or ICU cases will it take for Governor Scott to issue a temporary indoor mask mandate?

2. Our teachers and parents are calling for a statewide strategy for school districts in light of the transmissibility of the Delta variant and the growing number of infections among children not yet eligible for vaccines. They are deeply concerned about the lack of a unified strategy that would keep everyone safe from COVID in school environments. What is the plan for addressing their concerns?
3. School officials have stated that they need more guidance on how to respond to outbreaks in school. Will the Agency of Education be providing more detailed information for school administrators, so they have all the information they need to keep students and teachers safe?
4. New York City and other cities and towns across the country have announced that they will be requiring all public education employees to be vaccinated. We know that vaccines are our first and best strategy to prevent COVID hospitalizations and death, has the administration explored a vaccine requirement for all Vermont state employees and teachers?

It is encouraging that our case rate appears to be declining compared to two weeks ago, but Vermonters have consistently asked why we aren't doing more to prevent the spread of the virus. We have the tools available to protect ourselves, and any step we can take to prevent someone from being hospitalized or succumbing to this virus is worth taking.

Throughout the pandemic we have responded and adapted our strategy based on the guidance of scientists and medical professionals. Now at the start of a new school year, with infections in younger Vermonters rising, as well as breakthrough infections impacting the vaccinated, this is not the time to depart from listening to the experts and making the necessary health and safety decisions to keep our communities safe. The pandemic has taken a toll on all of us, and we should do everything we can to support those that have been leading the response, especially the individuals in our health care workforce that have been critical to keeping us healthy and safe. If we want to continue to lead the nation in our response to COVID, and do everything to keep Vermonters in all 14 counties safe, we must lean in to making changes that will mitigate the spread of COVID-19 across all Vermont communities.

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